

3A Near East 1853

# CONSTRUCTIVE WORK

## IN THE NEAR EAST

### Can America Help the Near Eastern Churches?

by JOHN R. VORIS

Reprint from CHRISTIAN WORK

January 23, 1926

*Constructive Work Series, No. 2*



**NEAR EAST RELIEF**  
**THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
of its  
**COUNCIL ON CHURCH RELATIONS AND**  
**OVERSEAS RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

(The Executive Committee includes the officers of the Council and those of its Committees.)

Chairman, Rev. James L. Barton, Boston

Vice-Chairmen :

Bishop James Cannon, Jr., Washington, D. C.

Rev. James I. Vance, Nashville

Rev. W. C. Emhardt, New York

Rev. Samuel McCrea Cavert, New York

\*Rev. John J. Burke, Washington, D. C.

Rev. Alexander Lyons, Brooklyn, New York

**COMMITTEES:**

1. *Relations with American Churches and Church Organizations*

Chairman, Rev. John M. Moore, Brooklyn

Vice-Chairman, Rev. Ralph W. Sockman, New York

2. *Religious Education and Sunday School Relations*

Chairman, Rev. W. Edward Raffety, Chicago

Vice-Chairman, Wm. G. Landes, New York

3. *Young People's Societies*

Chairman, Rev. Daniel A. Poling, New York

4. *Religious Press*

Chairman, Rev. Paul S. Leinbach, Philadelphia

5. *Religious Nature*

Chairman, Rev. Henry H. Meyer, New York

Secretary, Rev. B. S. Winchester, New York

6. *Overseas Church Relations*

Chairman, W. W. Peet, New York and Constantinople

Vice-Chairmen :

Rev. George Stewart, New York

Rev. Samuel McCrea Cavert, New York

7. *Relations with Mission Boards*

Chairman, \*Robert E. Speer, New York

Secretary, \*Rev. Fennell P. Turner, New York

8. *American Overseas Correlation*

Chairman, Rev. W. C. Emhardt, New York

---

\* Invitation given.

## CAN AMERICA HELP THE NEAR EASTERN CHURCHES?

By JOHN R. VORIS

**M**ANY who know the Near East—Greece, the Balkan States, Russia, Turkey, Syria and Persia—believe that a compelling case can be made for the proposition that among the very greatest objectives open to the Protestants of America in the next decade is the establishment of vital friendships with the indigenous national churches of that part of the earth. The gravest difficulty in the way of spreading that conviction is not any weakness in the facts of the case, but the inhibiting prejudices through which the most of American Christians look in that direction.

### Do We Know Them?

One great trouble is that these Eastern churches represent the religious life of peoples who are themselves but little understood. The very mention of the nations involved touches off an unfavorable reaction in most American minds. Russia—it's Bolshevik! The Balkans—always in some quarrel! Greece—how silly

she was to let Turkey whip her so hopelessly! Turkey—the Armenian massacres! The Armenians—pitiful weaklings! Persia—nothing but Mohammedans there! Syria—what part of the world is it anyhow that they call Syria? With such exclamations nationalistic Americans are more apt to turn their backs on the Near East. A double handful of gold for sorry little orphans, and a partial handful for their education, speak well for American charity, but that's about the limit of any serious American attention.

It is so even with those earnest American Christians who have shown themselves most concerned for saving the lives of the boys and girls who have been gathered into Near East Relief orphanages. It never seems to occur to these kind hearts that they ought also to be concerned about the churches with which these boys and girls will be associated after they have grown to manhood and womanhood—about religious life they are most likely to be identified with as adult citizens of the communities in which they settle when the Near East Relief “graduates” them. To many vigorous Protestant souls, the mere fact that the Eastern churches are all “Catholic,” or something like



that, is sufficient ground for complete disinterest in them; by that term alone they are branded as superstitious and decadent. This element in our American churches would no doubt give money freely to develop almost any branch of Protestantism in the Near East. But there is no use discussing that; the experience of the American Board of Foreign Missions in this part of the world shows that there is no chance of the Eastern churches losing their hold on any large section of their national constituencies. Religiously the masses of the Near East will be influenced through their indigenous and historic churches or not at all. Protestant churches in the Near East are significant primarily in the degree in which they have helped to form the minds of men influential in the old churches.

### Cooperating With Them

But all this points to a new kind of missionary work, which promises only influence and counts nothing in the way of converts to Western sectarian allegiance. That makes another obstacle to hinder its candid consideration as opportunity and duty. It is hard to rearrange the idea of missionary success that has prevailed with American Protestants for a cen-

tury. Yet it is certainly no small thing simply to exercise influence, when the forces to be influenced are such as these native churches of the Near East exercise. Every one of the countries that we have named is a country dominated by its church. They are countries that will go the way their churches lead—backward or forward. This is particularly true of Greece and, despite the efforts of the Soviet government to disintegrate religion, I think it is going to prove fully true in Russia. These nations surrounding the crossroads of Europe and Asia have loomed large enough in the world's eyes to call forth in the hour of their destitution and misery the greatest outpouring of charity that human history has ever known—a charity wholly Christian in motive and derived mostly from the benevolence of church people. Shall, then, those who have given so lavishly to the material wants of the nations of the Near East look coldly on when an attempt is made to direct their attention to spiritual needs in the same quarter? Even if there were nothing more in our minds than the economic and political stability of the Near East, we should appreciate the worth of churches alive to their social obligations and strong for justice between man and man.

Aside from the Roman Church, which is not nationally rooted anywhere in this region except in Syria—and yet, I sometimes think, understands the region better than other religious organizations—there are three external Christian bodies which are as thoroughly acclimated in the Near East as any others, and are therefore by experience and knowledge well fitted to lead in the movement for which I plead. These, as known in America, are the Congregational churches, the Presbyterian Church and the Episcopal Church. If these three unitedly will lead in approaching the Eastern churches with friendly overtures of helpfulness, other American churches will follow. For more than a century the Congregationalists have been in close touch with the Armenian Church, and the Presbyterians for almost as long with the Christians of Syria and of Northwest Persia—the latter chiefly Nestorians. Both have accumulated invaluable prestige in their fields of labor; their works have commended both themselves and their faith. There lie ready before them, therefore, easy stepping stones to the open door that I am pointing out.



## Their Desire for Cooperation

Moreover, for all three of these churches, overtures for partnership with the Eastern churches will involve no new fundamental policy. At a time when foreign missions was unconsciously almost as strong for Americanizing the world as for evangelizing it, and when hardly anybody thought of carrying Christianity abroad without taking along the rigid patterns of denominationalism, the American Board at Boston announced deliberately that it wished to "work with rather than away from the Eastern churches." The Presbyterian Foreign Board adopted the same policy. No Protestant organization among the Armenians was then contemplated. And the formation later of a Protestant community in Anatolian Armenia and in Syria was not a repudiation of that first purpose. It was merely an expedient in the face of difficulties, for at that time Armenian prelates and priests were not disposed to welcome the advent of the American missionaries nor any progressive suggestion from any source. For those, therefore, who did respond to the evangelical message which the Americans brought, separate congregations soon became inevitable, especially because the Turkish government would not tolerate unat-



tached Christians without a "church home." But the spirit of catholicity in which these boards sent forth their messengers was not really disparaged by this temporary necessity of setting up a Protestant community. Congregationalists and Presbyterians will only be returning to their original platform—which deserves to this day the applause of every lover of Christianity—when they offer aid to keep the Armenians loyal and active in their ancestral church. The difference now is that the present generation of Armenian ecclesiastics will welcome the aid.

### Mission School Contribution

The greatest statesmanship of the Congregationalists was shown in their planting of schools all over Anatolia. Armenians flocked to these institutions. They learned marvelously, progressing intellectually by leaps and bounds. The students of mission schools soon themselves became teachers of other Armenians. Nowhere in the world has the Christian mission enterprise made more potent use of education. The whole Armenian land was illuminated. But today—save for a few exceptions in Constantinople, Aleppo, Beirut, Salonika, and Athens—the Armenians themselves are gone from

practically all the communities where the American Board sent its teachers and gathered pupils. Is that educational work therefore to be called a failure and loss? By no means. Its harvest is just now ripening in the best promise of the present moment for the future of the Armenian people. Today practically the whole intellectual leadership for Armenian nationality in all the various territories in which the scattered remnants of the nation have found refuge comes and can come primarily from the men and women who have been trained in the American mission schools.

American schools for Armenians today are almost entirely the schools which the Near East itself conducts in its orphanages, and this educational work, together with the provision made by the same organization for Greek, Syrian, and Assyrian orphan children, constitutes the largest piece of educational work ever undertaken in the Near East. This service simply could not have been rendered except for the intellectual and spiritual preparedness of mission school graduates who, also escaping the massacres, were quick and eager to come to the help of their younger brothers and sisters as soon as Near East Relief began to gather into its arms this flotsam and jetsam of starving child-

hood. In all the varied aspects of this work of Near East Relief in the different areas where it has been established, several thousand of native teachers and other helpers have rendered invaluable assistance during the last decade, and from my inquiries last winter in Greece, Syria, and the Caucasus I am satisfied that more than nine-tenths of the whole number had at one time or another been under the instruction of American educational missionaries. Many, beyond the local schools, had had further advantage of the three great non-secretarian colleges—Robert College and the American College for Women at Constantinople, and the American University at Beirut. If it has been worth while for the hearts of America to put eighty millions of American money into saving the lives of these orphans, all the other millions that went previously into the missionary educational investment is justified by the one simple fact, if there were nothing else to say in its praise, that it has resulted in saving intelligence and religion also in the boys and girls who are the seed-corn of the future Armenian stock and lineage.

### Closer Relationships

Nor is the other work of Protestant preachers and teachers among the Armenians and

Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians must work together to devise and lead any adequate program of relationships with the Eastern churches.

### **Apostolic and Evangelical**

The greatest handicap to progress in the Armenian Church as it exists today is the paucity of strong lay personalities anywhere among its people. The Armenian Church has the people in overwhelming mass. But the educated minds, from the course of circumstances already indicated, are to be found chiefly in the Protestant congregations which have grown up around the mission schools. Thus the ancient church has the people but no young leadership to speak of. The isolated Protestant groups are full of potential leadership, but the masses are not there to be led. Plainly something needs to be done to bring this power and these masses into correlation. The problem extends indeed to the clergy. The direction of the Armenian church today is in the hands of a few very great, very godly, very aged prelates. Their parish forces are composed of a larger company of rather aged, rather ignorant priests. Higher and lower in the hierarchy there is but a lamentably small percentage of even relative youth, and by no means all of that well trained.



As this situation impresses itself on the minds of younger Armenians, who, because of their missionary associations, have continued in Protestant relationships, one hopes there will be a disposition growing among them to ally themselves with the venerable old church of their nation. One would not wish them to stifle any conviction about religious reality—especially about the reality of personal Christian experience—which has come to them through their Protestant training. But personally I believe that such young men and women could go into the old church of their fathers today without sacrifice of any part of the evangelical gospel—that they could carry with them a fervor of spirit which would literally regenerate the immemorial formularies of Eastern ritual, and could infuse into this splendid ancient organism the best impulses of modern social service and the best methods of modern religious education in a way that would speedily usher in a new day religiously in Eastern Christendom and I wish our American mission boards would encourage them to do it.

### A Practical Program

But a practical program of co-operation needs to be visualized. In such a program there

should be the leadership, not only of the mission boards concerned and the National Episcopal Council, but also the Federal Council, which now has a Commission on Eastern Churches of which Bishop Brent is chairman and Dr. George R. Montgomery is secretary.<sup>1</sup> The American interdenominational organizations now functioning in the Near East should be regarded as important factors in the situation. These include the Christian Associations, Near East Relief, American Bible Society, World Alliance, World's Sunday School Association, and Christian Endeavor Union.

One of the first needs to be met is the creation of religious education studies adapted to Gregorian and Greek Orthodox calendars and needs. Other very practical methods of a similar kind should be fostered.<sup>2</sup> In addition, there might well be the promotion of friendly relationships by some outstanding churchman representing the American churches through the Federal Council.<sup>3</sup>

I am confident that the missionaries of both the Congregational and Presbyterian churches now working in the Near East desire to represent not merely their own communions but other protestant communions as well, and I am sure

that the attitude of the secretaries of the mission boards involved is equally broad and generous.<sup>4</sup>

Through a strange providence Near East Relief has become an outstanding piece of missionary work. In its orphanages are the potential leaders of these Eastern churches. Near East Relief American and native teachers, and missionaries as well, following the clearly outlined policy of non-proselytism, have worked with the priests of the native churches in giving to the children not only services of worship under their native priests or pastors, but also simple chapel services, prayer meetings, Bible classes, and courses in general religious education.

I would close by saying that the need for such co-operative assistance is as great now as it has ever been. If it was advisable in the past to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in missionary and educational endeavor, and to jeopardize the lives of workers, surely there is still a challenge for the expenditure of an equal amount of energy. In addition there is a new feature; namely, this is the first time that there has been an adequate opportunity for the fellowship of the Eastern churches with our

churches. Churches of the East welcome and eagerly desire such co-operation. Close the door to the opportunity now and it may never come again. I firmly believe the day is at hand for a co-operative work by American churches in relationship to the Eastern churches.

---

Since this article was written:

<sup>1</sup> The Reverend Kenneth Miller has become the active secretary of this Commission.

<sup>2</sup> At the request of many native Church leaders and others overseas, religious education material is being prepared, by a committee created by representatives of all groups involved. Its members are:

For the Joint Committee on Methods and  
Materials for Religious Education in  
Foreign Fields—

Rev. Henry H. Meyer  
Rev. Eric North  
Rev. B. S. Winchester  
Rev. Herbert W. Gates

For the Greek Orthodox Church—

Rev. Germanos Kazakos  
G. P. Michaelides



A representative of the Greek Protestant Church.

For the Armenian Apostolic Church—

Levon N. Zenian

Rev. Bedros Hagopian

For the Armenian Evangelical Church—

Rev. M. T. Kalaidjian

A representative of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

The Joint Committee officially represents the foreign mission boards cooperating in the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, the World's Sunday School Association, and the International Council of Religious Education.

<sup>3</sup> Steps have been taken by the Federal Council, through its Commission on Eastern Churches, to send Dr. W. W. Peet, as a friendly ambassador from the Churches of America to those of the Near East. For many years he represented the American Board and other American educational and philanthropic interests in Constantinople. He knows the Near East as few Americans do. He knows and trusts, and is known and trusted by, Eastern Church leaders to an extraordinary degree.

Dr. Peet is Chairman of the Overseas Church Relations Committee of Near East Relief, which includes:

Rev. George Stewart, Vice-Chairman

Rev. S. M. Cavert, Vice-Chairman

Rev. George R. Montgomery, Secretary

Rev. A. E. Cory

Rt. Rev. Warren G. Rogers

Mrs. Jeanette W. Emrich

Rev. Floyd W. Tompkins, Jr.

Representatives in the major cities of the Near East, and

The Federal Council's Committee on Relations with Eastern Churches as a co-operating body.

<sup>4</sup> A Committee on Correlation of Near East agencies has been formed, with Dr. W. C. Emhardt of the Protestant Episcopal Church as Chairman, and representative of the: American Board,

Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions,  
Federal Council of Churches, Commission  
on Eastern Churches,

World's Sunday School Association,

Young Men's Christian Association,

Young Women's Christian Association,

Foreign Missions Conference,

Near East Relief,

American Bible Society,  
World Alliance,  
World's Christian Endeavor Union,  
The Greek Orthodox Church,  
Armenian Apostolic Church, and the  
Armenian Evangelical Church.

---





# NEAR EAST RELIEF

## OFFICERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

JAMES L. BARTON, *Chairman*

John H. Finley, Vice-Chairman

Cleveland H. Dodge, Hon. Treasurer

Frank L. Polk, General Counsel

Charles V. Vickrey, General Secretary

E. C. Miller, Acting Treasurer

Hurdman & Cranstoun, Certified Public Accountants, Auditors

---

## MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

EDWIN M. BULKLEY, *Chairman*

James L. Barton

Henry Morgenthau

Cleveland H. Dodge

George A. Plimpton

John H. Finley

Albert Shaw

Harold H. Hatch

Oliver J. Sands

William B. Millar

Charles V. Vickrey

---

## EXECUTIVE CABINET

John R. Voris

E. C. Miller

Wm. E. Doughty

Laird W. Archer

Barclay Acheson

Charles D. Morris

John W. Mace

Mrs. M. B. Horton

---

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

John R. Voris, Director

Clyde F. Armitage, Churches

Lillian M. Ascough, Women's Organizations

Hubert M. Greist, Men's Organizations

PAMPHLET SERIES  
ON  
CONSTRUCTIVE WORK IN THE NEAR EAST

The constructive training program for the orphan wards of Near East Relief, which is in progress during the period while the are too young for self-support, has won the interest of American leaders in a way tht demands we set it forth in printed form. People are generally familiar with the relief work done for the refugees who were expelled from Asia Minor, and are glad to learn of the hope of a new Near East, promise of which is now given through these orphans who are being trained for leadership in the agricultural, industrial, eductional, and religious reconstruction of their countries in the coming generation. The several phases of the work are presented in the "Constructive Work Series" of pamphlets:

1. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR NEAR EAST ORPHANS.
2. CAN AMERICA HELP THE NEAR EASTERN CHURCHES ?
3. LEADERS FOR NEAR EAST CHURCHES.
4. EDUCATIONAL POLICY OF NEAR EAST RELIEF.
5. SOCIAL ELEMENTS IN NEAR EAST RELIEF.
6. NEAR EAST LEAGUE OF YOUTH.

NOTE—Others will follow.

Separate copies of any or all the above free on request. 50 cents per dozen, \$3.00 per hundred, to repay cost of printing and mailing. Order from

*Near East Relief, 151 Fifth Avenue, New York.*